

Teacher professionalism in Sri Lanka: A comprehensive literature review on practices and challenges

R. G. T. S. Kumari, C. P. W. Malepathirana

Faculty of Education, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Teacher professionalism is a pivotal component in enhancing educational quality and school effectiveness. This systematic literature review (SLR) critically examines the practices and challenges associated with developing teacher professionalism in Sri Lanka, with a focus on School-Based Professional Teacher Development (SBPTD). Drawing on a comprehensive review of national and international literature, this study synthesizes conceptual frameworks, policy directions, and empirical findings related to SBPTD implementation in Sri Lankan government schools. Using the systematic literature review (SLR), 50 articles were selected, and among them finally 20 articles selected using the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The findings reveal that although SBPTD is endorsed in Sri Lankan education policies, its conceptualization and implementation vary across settings. Principals and teachers tend to view the concept as a continuous process to be implemented within schools through self-study rather than as a workshop conducted by an external party. The effectiveness of SBPTD is influenced by factors such as leadership quality, institutional culture, teacher agency and availability of resources. Moreover, the literature identifies a gap between policy intent and school-level practice, where SBPTD is often reduced to a compliance activity rather than a meaningful learning process. The review also highlights international best practices that promote teacher autonomy, peer collaboration and contextual learning principles that are underutilized in the Sri Lankan education system. This review highlights professionalism as directly linked to teachers' ability to make decisions, experiment with new methods, and take ownership of their professional growth. A key challenge is, though the success of School-Based Professional Teacher Development (SBPTD) is highly dependent on individual school principals, according to literature many leaders treat it as a "bureaucratic necessity," focusing on checklists and paperwork rather than fostering a genuine culture of inquiry and pedagogical improvement. By aligning it with global discourses, this study contributes to the theoretical understanding and practical advancement of teacher professionalism in Sri Lanka. It offers clear recommendations for education leaders, policymakers, and school practitioners seeking to improve professional development outcomes through localized, school-led approaches.

Keywords: *Teacher professionalism, School-based development, Professional learning, Sri Lanka, Educational reform*